Jack Chalon, M.D.
Department of Anesthesiology
School of Medicine
New York University Medical Center
550 First Avenue
New York, New York 10016

Epidemiology of Tracheobronchial Multinucleation.

A study is being conducted on the tracheobronchial secretions of patients undergoing general anesthesia for surgery. Smears are made from material suctioned from the endotracheal tube.

A partly prospective and partly retrospective survey on approximately 1,000 patients with a wide variety of prediagnosed extrathoracic malignancies has shown that this population group has an incidence and degree of tracheobronchial epithelial multinucleation significantly higher than a control group matched for age, sex and smoking habit. Cigarette smoking influences the degree of tracheobronchial multinucleation in patients of both sexes with cancer. However, cigarette smoking plays only a minor role in the development of multinucleation, and the single overriding factor affecting this phenomenon is the presence of malignancy. The degree of multinucleation varies with the stage of the growth, being at its highest with early invasive lesions and much lower with intraepithelial cancers and with advanced tumors which invade lymph nodes and distant organs. An epidemiologic survey of approximately 300 patients who were followed up after cancer surgery has shown that a significantly higher recurrence rate was noted in patients who had less than 2.5% multinucleated epithelial cells in smears than in those in which multinucleation reached or surpassed that figure.

Data derived from an extension of the study will be used to devise a test for the diagnosis of occult cancer anywhere in the body and for the prognosis of patients who have undergone cancer surgery.

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